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# Androgyny

By

Yu-Chi Chien

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Fine Arts in Metals & Jewelry Design

School for American Crafts: Metals & Jewelry Design  
College of Imaging Arts & Sciences

R·I·T

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

July 26, 2017

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## **Proposal and Abstract**

Cognition is a mental activity during which information is received through perception and judgment. From birth people gradually construct their own cognitive understanding of the world. Predecessors often transmit their own past experiences to others in order to efficiently build up the values that they think are correct. For constructing cognition easily and rapidly, predecessors tend to generalize and simplify the information so that others can readily understand and judge, but it is often distorted and doesn't express the full meaning inside.

People have the ability to explore their own answer for everything. However, after the process of simplifying information by predecessors, a rigid formula and the standard explanation often root in people's minds. Therefore, people frequently are trapped in black-and-white thinking and struggle in dualities such as male and female, right and wrong, strong and gentle. However, these options can't completely cover all the possibilities. All things in the world are too complicated to be easily defined and sorted into two opposites. They can't be summarized with a certain value or just two sides, but people still tend to use this rough definition in order to help them make a decision or sort things out easily. The ambiguous things that are not fit in bifurcation usually aren't accepted by society. They suffer from discrimination and exclusion due to misunderstandings.

According to Taoism, things will go to the opposite manner when they develop over extreme. Everything balances on its own. There is only a concept of a relative rather than

an absolute value. Nevertheless, choosing not to choose is also an option. We can choose to wander between two opposite ways, not excess or deficiency, but both and without boundaries. If we can embrace the experience of opposites with our broad mind, the opposites will allow us to realize the expression of wholeness.

I hope to represent this phenomenon in my artwork and genuinely elaborate the fact from observation in my own way. The goal of my work is to maintain the balance and harmony of two opposites in order to direct the mind to a state of constant equilibrium. It's a way to represent the epitome of the interdependent universe from which everything comes.

## Discussion of Sources and Research

At first, when I had to decide on the topic for this thesis, I wanted to explore some ideas more related to self, because I see art as a way to self-express. I wanted to work on something close to my own experience and find something meaningful. I tried to trace back through my life and reflect on my personality and characteristics. I recalled some experiences and self-doubt I had as a teenager. Honestly, I'm still struggling and trying to figure out the answer during the process of the thesis.

My eldest sister, the first child of my parents, was born to be independent and assertive. She enjoys different outdoor activities and is always active. However, I'm completely a contrary type to her. I like indoor activity more than being outdoors. Our personalities are basically opposite. She is fast and decisive, but I'm more gentle and careful. We struggle between the differences of our characters and of our gender role. I was eager to figure out what is the exact reason why we each are bothered to be what we are. Therefore, I did some research about the definition of sex and gender at the beginning of the thesis project.

### Gender

Gender is the range of characteristics between masculinity and femininity. These characteristics may include biological sex, gender roles, or gender identity.<sup>1,2</sup> The gender of a person can be complicated. It includes several aspects of characteristics such as

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<sup>1</sup> Udry, J. Richard (November 1994). The Nature of Gender. *Demography*. 31 (4): 561–573.

<sup>2</sup> Haig, David (April 2004). The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Titles, 1945–2001. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 33 (2): 87–96.

appearance, language, movement, etc. It's not easy to categorize. While many people tend to assume that there is a simple binary division, the definition of gender is changing constantly.

## Biological Sex

Gender differentiation is the concept of human gender differences. It is defined as the development of phenotypic structures that are caused by the effects of hormones produced by the gonads.<sup>3</sup> Sexual differentiation includes the development of different genital and internal reproductive tracts, breasts, and body hair, and plays a role in gender identification.<sup>4</sup>

Seven weeks after pregnancy, the fetus has a genital tubercle, urogenital groove and sinus, and labioscrotal folds. In females, without excess androgens, these tissues become the clitoris, urethra, vagina, and labia.

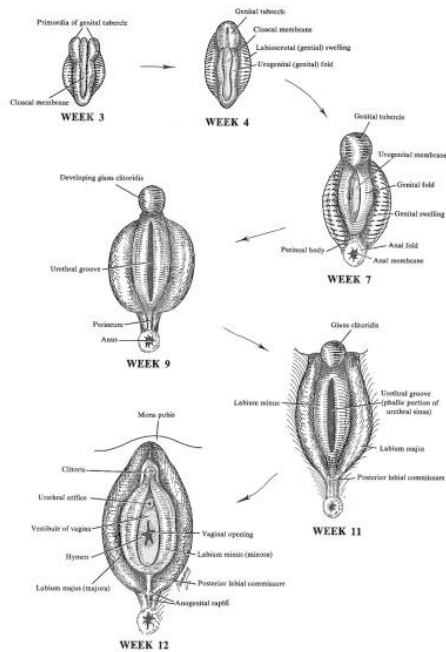
Males become different at 8 to 12 weeks, because the androgen enlarges the penis and folds of the genitourinary tract and sinus in the midline, resulting in the penile penis and the clitoral urethra, and a thin, gloomy scrotum. Dihydrotestosterone will distinguish the remaining male characteristics of the genitalia.<sup>3</sup>

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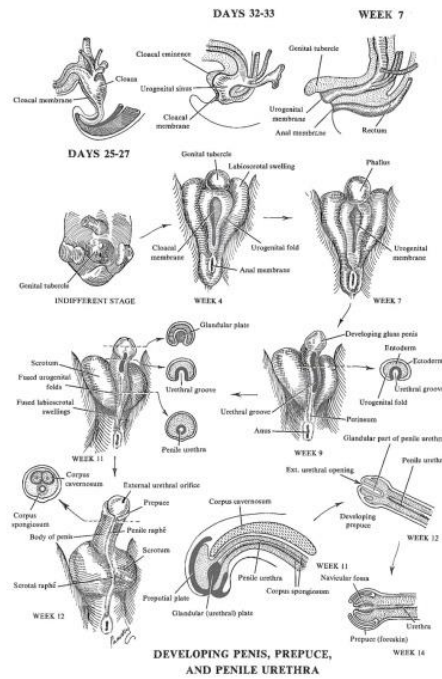
<sup>3</sup> Hughes, Ieuan A. (June 12, 2011). Minireview: Sex Differentiation.  
<http://endo.endojournals.org/content/142/8/3281.full>

<sup>4</sup> P.C. Sizonenko. Human Sexual Differentiation  
[http://www.gfmer.ch/Books/Reproductive\\_health/Human\\_sexual\\_differentiation.html](http://www.gfmer.ch/Books/Reproductive_health/Human_sexual_differentiation.html)





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## Intersex

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads, and chromosomal patterns) that do not meet the typical binary concept of male or female body. Intersex is a general term used to describe a wide range of natural body variations. In some cases, abnormal traits can be seen at birth, and in other cases, they are not obvious before puberty. The chromosomal intersex variation may not be obvious at all.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://goo.gl/WXEjov>

<sup>6</sup> <https://goo.gl/7nxj8j>

<sup>7</sup> (2015). "Free & Equal Campaign Fact Sheet: Intersex". United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

## Gender Roles

Over the years, gender roles have changed and have had a significant impact on the marriage system. Gender role can be defined as the behavior, values, and attitudes that society generally considers suitable for men and for women. Driven by the women's rights movement and other movements, gender roles have begun to change, leading to shifting economic patterns, women entering the workplace, and so on. Traditionally, men and women have opposite roles, with men expected to serve as family providers, and women expected to be as caretakers of both the home and the family. However, in today's society, the division of roles has begun to blur. More and more people are employing non-traditional gender roles in their marriages and sharing responsibilities. This revolutionary view of gender roles seeks equality between the sexes. In today's society, men and women are each as likely to be family providers. More and more women are entering the labor force, and more men are contributing to the housework burden. Despite the fact that there is still a gap between gender roles, roles are less gendered and more equal in comparison to the previous generations today.<sup>8</sup>

## Instrumental and Expressive Action

In general, for traditional families the husband is more likely to provide material support and primary leadership in the family. The wife is more likely to provide affection and moral support. This distinction relates to the instrumental and expressive needs of all small groups (including families); that is, the need for leadership and fulfillment of the

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<sup>8</sup> Jackson, C (2012). "Introduction: Marriage, gender relations and social change". *Journal of Development Studies*. 48 (1): 1–9.

task on the one hand and the need for morale and cohesion on the other.

In the family, the father typically plays the instrumental role and the mother plays the expressive one. In other words, men tend to be task-oriented leaders, while women dominate social and emotional behavior. The result of this is that the husband's purchasing decision ends the concern about the functional product attributes and exerts more influence in determining whether to buy and in closing the sale. The wife is more concerned about the aesthetic product attribute and with suggesting the purchase.<sup>9</sup>

Although these gender roles are historically true, they are changing in some degree today, especially as more women enter the labor force. Now, wives perform the same instrumental roles as their husbands do.

## Gender Polarization

Gender polarization is a concept in the sociology defined by American psychologist Sandra Bem, who points out that societies tend to define femininity and masculinity as polar opposites in terms of their presentation by each sex, such as male-acceptable behaviors and attitudes are not considered suitable for women, and vice versa.<sup>10</sup>

According to Bem, gender polarization begins with natural gender differences that are exaggerated in culture; for example, women have less hair than men and men have more muscles than women, but body differences are exaggerated when women remove hair

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<sup>9</sup> Human Resource Management (March 8, 2010). "Instrumental and Expressive Roles". <https://www.citeman.com/9108-instrumental-and-expressive-roles.html>

<sup>10</sup> Monnier , Christine (2011). "Global Sociology, Gendered Society - Basic Concepts".

from their faces, legs, and armpits, and when men engage in physical exercise to emphasize muscle mass.<sup>11, 12</sup>

When genders become polarized, according to theory, there is no overlap between men and women, no shared behavior or attitudes; on the contrary, they are the opposite.<sup>10</sup>

According to Scott Coltrane and Michele Adams, gender polarization begins in early childhood, when girls are encouraged to prefer pink over blue, and when boys are encouraged to prefer toy trucks over dolls.<sup>13</sup>

After further understanding of the genders and sex, most information still stays in the binary division. In reality, people have different aspects of characters and features. Humans are more complicated. I believe there must be something between two characteristics. I wanted to explore if there is any research about how they are defined. The follows are what I found:

## Androgyny

Androgyny is the combination of male and female characteristics. By Brenda Mae Woodhill, a person who is androgynous is free to engage in what is seen as masculine or feminine behaviors as well as activities. They have a balanced identity, including the virtues of both genders, and can separate the task from the gender that is socially or physically assigned. People who are androgynous disregard what traits are culturally

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<sup>11</sup> (October 5, 2013). BBC. "Why can men grow facial hair but women cannot".

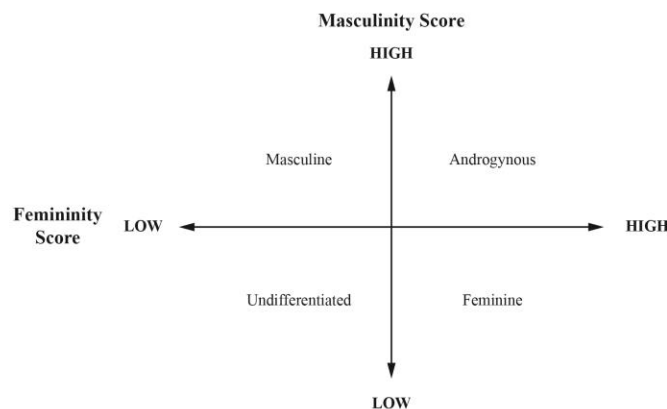
<sup>12</sup> Sandra Lipsitz Bem. (1999). "A Nation Divided: Diversity, Inequality, and Community in American Society". Cornell University Press. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Scott Coltrane, Michele Adams, "Gender and Families", Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008, Engendering Children (chapter), Retrieved Aug. 22, 2014, (page 183+)

constructed specifically for males and females within a specific society, and rather focus on the most effective behavior in the situation.<sup>14</sup> According to Sandra Bem, androgynous men and women are more flexible and more mentally healthy than either masculine or feminine individuals and undifferentiated individuals are less competent.<sup>15</sup>

## Bem Sex-Role Inventory

The study by psychologist Sandra Bem (1974) is very instructive in the discussion of androgyny. Bem's research points out that it is possible to combine different degrees of feminine and masculinity in one person and the androgynous personality is more self-actualized. It is conceivable that in our society exists not two (male / female) or four (masculine male / masculine female / feminine male / feminine female) classifications of gender, but that there are myriad "female-male" and "feminine masculine" individuals in different positions on different vertical axes.



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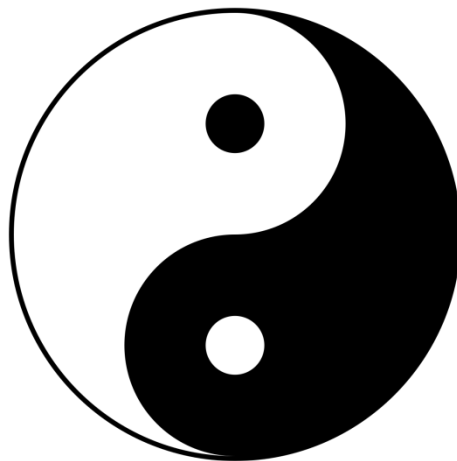
<sup>14</sup> Woodhill, Brenda; Samuels, Curtis (2004). "DESIRABLE AND UNDESIRABLE ANDROGYNY: A PRESCRIPTION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY". Journal of Gender Studies.

<sup>15</sup> Santrock, J. W. (2008). A Topical Approach to Life-Span Development. New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies. 007760637X

The two theories above are from the western scientific aspect, I wonder how our ancient Chinese philosophers looked at gender and sex. Hence, I researched some theories from Taoism. They still roughly divided things into two categories, but they have a distinctive way of seeing how these two things react to each other.

## Ying and Yang

In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang are two opposite and contrary energies. They're complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world. They transform into different things and phenomena. Everything has both yin and yang aspects, and they don't exist without one another. They give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another.<sup>16</sup> They're bound together as parts of a mutual whole that is greater than the assembled parts. They form a dynamic system and reach a balance between two opposites with a portion of the opposite element in each section.



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<sup>16</sup> Porkert (1974). *The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine*. MIT Press.

## Moderation

Moderation means to treat your life with an attitude of impartiality and compromise. It is a process of avoiding excess or deficiency and trying to eliminate or lessen extremes.

There is nothing that cannot be moderated including one's actions, one's desires, and even one's thoughts. When reaching the moderation in mind, people aren't influenced by any emotion and they can maintain a calm and peaceful condition. People achieve a more natural state, face less resistance in life and recognize their limits. It's the original state of everything in the world to keep in a harmonious balance. However, moderation is not a principle that is intended to ignore the extremes of both sides. Only after you carefully study, and experience the two sides, you can truly understand how to manipulate everything through knowing their limits.

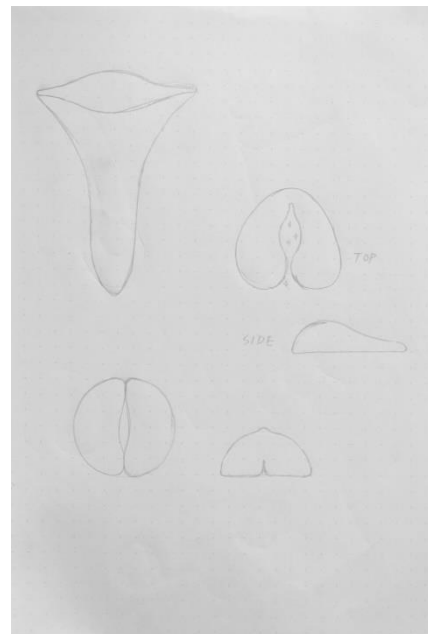
## Critical Analysis

### Gender of Body

After a period of reading and research, I was inspired to explore many directions. At first, I wanted to create sculptures that embrace two opposite genders. I wanted to create forms that blur the boundary between opposite genders, rather than simply put two conflicted elements together. I expected audiences could define what the sculptures are through their viewpoints because the sculptures don't completely belong to any gender.

I did some research on visual elements from human anatomy. I tried to find out the most distinctive symbols of the human body that could represent two opposite genders. After a series of comparisons and observations, I decided to draw my materials from sex characteristics, and to find some similarities between male and female. I mixed and blended the similarities together in my sculptures to create an ambiguous zone of two contrary symbols, or used different angles of view to merge them together.

Furthermore, I also wanted to present a harmonious balance in my sculpture, because the concept I wanted to convey is two contrasting elements combining peacefully and calmly instead of creating conflict and tension. Therefore, I planned to create a round and plump shape to express this idea. In addition, the round

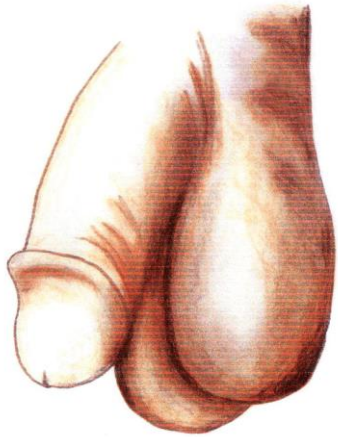




shape means an endless circulation, which is an epitome of a universe.

In the beginning of the first piece, I transformed my form from testicles, breasts, glans, and vagina. I adjusted the real sizes of these components and overlapped the profile of these organs together to construct a shape between all of them. I built up a 3D model from the computer first and transformed it into an origami structure. Therefore, I can layout my design and form the hollow structure from a copper plate.





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For the second piece, I played with the different aspects of viewing sculpture and used the empty space to build up the figure. I combined a single breast and a mixed form of the front view of the glans and vagina.

<sup>17</sup> <https://goo.gl/EuQxDW>

<sup>18</sup> <https://goo.gl/gVt2sn>

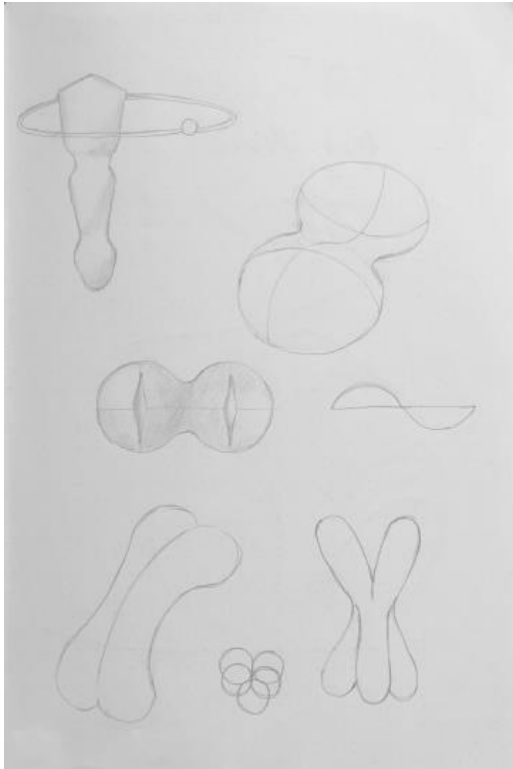
<sup>19</sup> <https://goo.gl/KTdEPj>

<sup>20</sup> <https://goo.gl/n4z3S3>



For the third piece, I created the same two figures, but I reversed one of them to represent the opposite gender. One is protruded and the other is sunken. The protruded side is extruded and outward and it represents the male. On the contrary, the sunken side is acceptance and contains everything and it is like the stereotypical female characteristic. However, they are in the same outline and merge into an infinity symbol.





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<sup>21</sup> <https://goo.gl/kkuEuR>



I hammered dots and ground threadlike texture on the surface of the sculptures in order to imitate human's skin. In addition, I applied patina on them to enhance the contrast of the texture. I displayed the same sculpture on different people, positions, and aspects. I wanted to perform the relationship between the sculptures and the human body in order to realize the pieces can represent any gender or in between.



## Gender of Mind

In the process of making the first stage of pieces, my thoughts kept developing. After deeply researching gender and sex as well as some self-exploration, I found out gender shouldn't be limited to concrete figures. It is also defined by abstract temperament and even some expectations from society. Many people still struggle with the traditional definition of gender. They try to figure out on which side they belong and make themselves fit into the standards. In my view, people shouldn't be pigeon-holed into any category.

The body is a complicated composition, and so is our mind. The diversity of mind can't be simplified in any easy way. Actually, a mind is somewhere in between. People are a mixture of masculine, feminine, chaos, control and many opposing elements, and they don't always remain stable. They change frequently, but reach a dynamic balance in our life journey.

At the second stage, I wanted to discuss more abstract behavior and mind of gender. So, I attempted to create some sculptures that involve more culture and invisible phenomena around our lives. They're common and close to us but easily ignored. For example, iconic poses, advertising images and even color selection influences us both consciously and sub-consciously.

In my personal experience, I found out children are like pieces of blank paper. They're pure and innocent and easily influenced by adults. They're taught to meet the correct standards set by adults, and try to cater to the expectation of their parents or society. For

instance, the color choice for children's clothing is often gender based and how they should behave is guided by their gender. Often they lost their original appearance.

If a child is born a biological male, most people will expect him to act like a man. He should be outgoing and play sports. By contrast, if a child is female, she should be sensitive and behave gently. These cliché stereotypes are still present, but nowadays they have been lessened.

As the first piece in my invisible series, I wanted to perform some stereotypes of gender roles in our society. Consequently, I drew the materials from iconic poses that are strong symbols rooted in our culture.



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Bending elbows to pump up biceps is a pose that demonstrates male masculine power. On the other hand, females are always taught to close their legs to exhibit a polite and meek manner. For this piece, I created armor to lock my joints and arm therefore forcing the

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<sup>22</sup> <https://goo.gl/JisdUC>

<sup>23</sup> <https://goo.gl/Qy1Shr>



performance these two poses together. This resulted in presenting the balance between these two characteristics in one body. This performance signifies that people are confined by stereotypes from society.

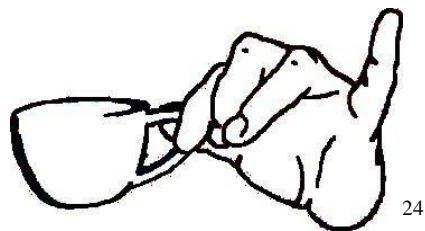
I cast my joints into several plaster models and formed plastic sheets on the models with vacuum technique. I chose transparent plastic to be my material for the purpose of lessening the visible evidence of my sculpture. I wanted to express and emphasize the pose, so the sculpture itself is not the main character.







For the second invisible piece, I included more meaning and the power of a pose. Lifting the pinky finger is usually related to femininity. Hence, I held a heavy solid ball with this pose.



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By contrast, I bent my elbow to catch a piece of light paper in a masculine way. I intended to let the audience think that being masculine is not always the strongest and efficient way. It's also a powerful way to support our lives by being soft and tactful.

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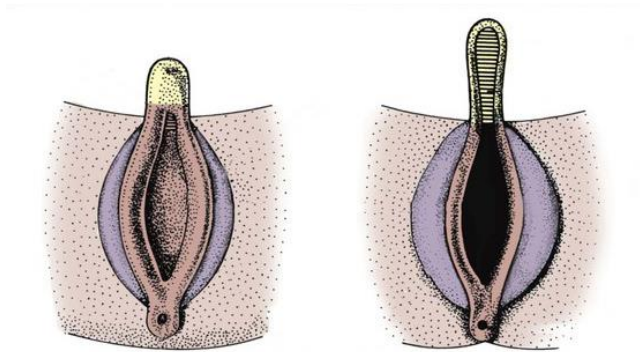
<sup>24</sup> <https://goo.gl/5t6tym>



## Gender of Society

After developing medium-scale sculptures, I wanted to explore further how people are influenced by society. Gender is not only determined by biological characteristics and inner temperament, but also from the expectations of society.

I studied some resources on the development of the genitals and drew the undifferentiated figure as my material. I enlarged the shape into a prototype of my sculpture and deconstructed the shape into several lines to imitate the texture of muscle fibers.

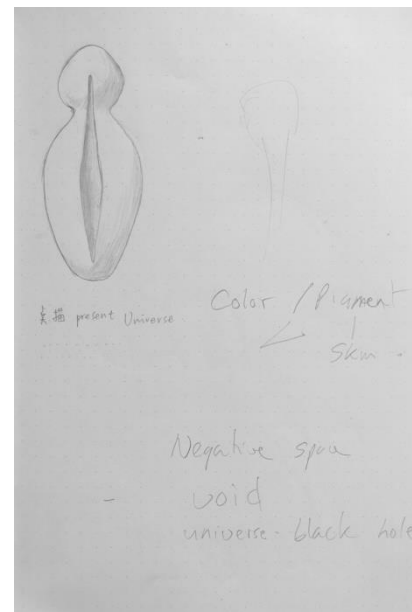


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When light projects on it, two layers of shadow from the structure merge together on the wall. It serves as a metaphor for how society projects its expectations on individuals, but a person combines their own value on self. The figure and the size are also similar to the average human profile. When audiences stand in front of this sculpture, it is like a mirror that reflects themselves. It seems like a self-portrait of the audience and it is also watched and criticized by audiences on the wall.



<sup>25</sup> <https://goo.gl/cQzyBb>

<sup>26</sup> <https://goo.gl/UEZ7yC>

## Conclusion

After the long journey of this thesis, I feel my mind has expanded. I know gender is not a unique theme and has been explored by many artists already. Nevertheless, it is a record of my life. For me, the process of the thesis is a brief life review. It's a stopping point to take a rest and check the influences on my life. I tried to seek the deepest parts of my mind and realize who I am and where I want to go. It's helpful to reconstruct and reorganize my mind. However, there never will be the end point. The answer will keep transforming in the future.

I also learned how to be honest in my work. All I wish is a discussion between the audience and me and to create a response or have a small influence on someone's mind. Although language is the fastest way to express an idea, art provides more space to let people think and create their own answer. That's why I kept my pieces obscure and not too literal. I want to raise questions instead of offering answers.

My pieces are like a full journey, and they are inseparable. People can see the development of the whole idea. This project was triggered from a simple thought and kept growing and expanding. The ideas continue to collide, reconstruct and even merge. It is like how the universe was born. I expect to create more explosions and share the universe with others in the future.

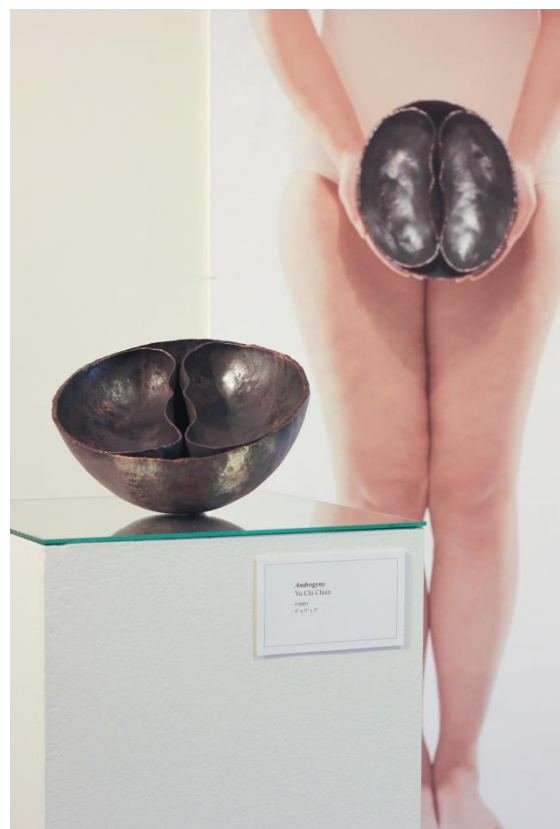
## Documentation of the Work































## Reference

- <sup>1</sup> Udry, J. Richard (November 1994). The Nature of Gender. *Demography*. 31 (4): 561–573.
- <sup>2</sup> Haig, David (April 2004). The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Titles, 1945–2001. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 33 (2): 87–96.
- <sup>3</sup> Hughes, Ieuan A. (June 12, 2011). Minireview: Sex Differentiation.  
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- <sup>5</sup> <https://goo.gl/WXEjov>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://goo.gl/7nxj8j>
- <sup>7</sup> (2015). "Free & Equal Campaign Fact Sheet: Intersex". United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- <sup>8</sup> Jackson, C (2012). "Introduction: Marriage, gender relations and social change". *Journal of Development Studies*. 48 (1): 1–9.
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- <sup>13</sup> Scott Coltrane, Michele Adams, "Gender and Families", Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008, Engendering Children (chapter), Retrieved Aug. 22, 2014, (page 183+)
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- <sup>16</sup> Porkert (1974). *The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine*. MIT Press.
- <sup>17</sup> <https://goo.gl/EuQxDW>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://goo.gl/gVt2sn>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://goo.gl/KTdEPj>
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- <sup>21</sup> <https://goo.gl/kkuEuR>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://goo.gl/JisdUC>
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- <sup>24</sup> <https://goo.gl/5t6tym>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://goo.gl/cQzyBb>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://goo.gl/UEZ7yC>